

wines without knowing how ^{they} grapes grow or the tongue ^{mainly wise} tastes them. To some extent ^{choose the great} this is true; but Reliable cannot be called. Even the best critics are after the event. It is not they who writers (that is done by time and the common reader): they only praise, expound, and comment on them when chosen. Even the deft fingers of a Coleridge, a Sainte-Beuve, or an Arnold, however skilful at embalming or dissecting the dead, have made some nasty slips in handling the living. And not the living only. It would make a most illuminating anthology, if someone—may it soon be done!—would collect all the verdicts of famous critics that time has turned to derision. It might even—but no, nothing could do that—inspire a few momentary doubts in the minds of some of their living successors. What name, for instance, more eminent in criticism than Coleridge?—who yet found Gibbon's prose detestable and Tennyson ignorant of what metre was; who could discover nothing 'sublime' in Greek literature and was so grotesquely inappreciative of French, as to give public thanks to God in a London lecture that he could not pronounce a line of the language—much as if a man should claim to be publicly admired for going about with one eye shut. Think, again, of Hazlitt, unable 'to make head or tail' of Shakespeare's *Sonnets*; dismissing

Racine as one who cannot lay bare the heart',
and simply
'reads lectures out of a commonplace book';
of De
Quincey denouncing Keats for having
'trampled upon
his mother-tongue as with the hoofs of a
buffalo', or
talking glibly of the prodigious defects of the
French in
all the higher qualities of prose composition'
and of the
inferiority of Voltaire to Horace Walpole; of
Swinburne,
shocked by *Venus and Adonis* and by Walt
Whitman,